

Residential Recycling Working Well – Except for Magazines & Catalogs

Community-run recycling programs are capturing most of the residential items banned from Wisconsin landfills except for magazines and catalogs. For some reason their recycling rate remains low, somewhere between 31 and 35%. That's too bad because magazines and catalogs are made with high quality paper and have a good recycling market value.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has long suspected the magazine and catalog recycling rate was low based on periodic household recycling surveys conducted by the University of Wisconsin Survey Research Center. In its 2002 survey, the Center found that even though 94% of Wisconsin residents surveyed said they recycle, only 72% claimed to recycle magazines. DNR's suspicions were further confirmed after Cascadia Consulting Group conducted a waste sort at Wisconsin landfills. Cascadia's *Waste Characterization and Management Study* estimated that over 47,000 tons of magazines and catalogs were landfilled in 2001. This represents approximately 17.5 pounds of magazines and catalogs for each person in the state.

Though our magazine and catalog recycling rate is low, we're still doing better than our neighboring states. When DNR compared its waste sort data with that from Minnesota and Iowa, it found that each person in Minnesota is throwing away over 32 pounds of magazines and catalogs a year, and each person in Iowa is throwing away over 40 pounds a year.

Even though local governments must include magazines and catalogs in their residential recycling program, there are probably several reasons for these low recycling rates. Local communities may not have promoted magazine and catalog recycling; residents may not consider catalogs the same as magazines and throw the catalogs away; magazines and catalogs may take extra care (like tying in bundles) to prepare for recycling; and people may save magazines for future reference.

Low magazine and catalog recycling rates mean a loss of potential revenue for local recycling programs. In 2003, recycled magazines and catalogs were worth \$45-\$60 a ton while newsprint was worth \$70-\$75 a ton. Also, plants that make newsprint want old magazines along with old newspapers. Magazines and catalogs have a high quality paper fiber, and their glossy clay coating is a desired component when recycled newsprint is made.

So, bundle up those magazines and catalogs and place them out at the curb with the rest of your recyclables or take them to your nearest "drop-off" center. Check on your local government recycling requirements first to make sure you're doing it right.

The studies mentioned above can be found under "Recycling Studies" on DNR's Web site at: <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/aw/wm/recycle/>.